

Letter from Z. F. Westervelt to Alexander Graham Bell, March 30, 1891

Rochester, N. Y., March 30th, 1891. My Dear Dr. Bell:—

On my return home after seeing you in Philadelphia, though I had considerable institute business to attend to, I felt that I must hurry to do what I could to prevent the Hartford people rushing into print, as I feared they would do if Dr. Gallaudet had gone to Hartford as he told Mr. Crouter he had planned doing, unless they had opportunity for knowing another side of the matter which Dr. Gallaudet would present to them.

I arrived at home on Sunday, the 15th, and on Monday we had a holiday and fete day, for it was the birthday of the founder of the school; a day celebrated with great enthusiasm by the children, and a time when the principal is expected to be most agreeable to the little ones. We had a delightful time, so that I quite forgot Dr. Gallaudet, but the next day and day after were devoted to getting of a letter to Dr. Fay of Hartford. I inclose the letter that I wrote Dr. Gallaudet. I also copied a letter I received from Dr. G. O. Fay, which I thought he would have no objection to my sending you. I waited for his consent, however, before sending you any of this matter. I received Dr. Fay's answer this (Monday) morning. He says his letter to me was personal and for my information only, and if it has helped me in forming my judgment, it has answered its end. I am sorry not to have you see it for it would give you as sincere satisfaction as it did me.

You will see in the letter to Dr. G. O. Fay I have taken the liberty as Mr. Blattner— I suppose it was he— has done in the Texas Mute Ranger, of stating what you believe . I sent you a marked copy of the "Mute Ranger" on Friday.

I thank you in my own name and the name of my teachers for the Volta Bureau pamphlet on marriage— All are glad to possess copies.

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Very sincerely yours, Z. F. Westervelt

WESTERN NEW YORK INSTITUTION for DEAF-MUTES, 945 NORTH SAINT PAUL STREET. Rochester, N. Y., March 18 18 th, 1891. My Dear Dr. Fay:—

I started to write you last Friday morning in Philadelphia, but before I had finished the letter Mr. Crouter came for me to go with him to Washington; and from then until now there has not seemed to be time when I could take up the thread of my discourse. I united with Mr. Crouter in a telegram to Mr. Williams asking him to use his influence with Dr. Gallaudet to bring about a reconciliation between him and Dr. Bell for the sake of the college and the profession, but we were both so occupied that we were prevented sending it while I was with him. I do not know whether he sent it later or not, but I hope he did. I should have been more inclined to telegraph if I had felt as familiar with Mr. Williams as I do with you. I hardly wanted to ask him to do anything without a fuller explanation than I could give him by telegraph.

I should like to have you understand my view of the matter between Dr. Bell and Dr. Gallaudet, and will tell you a little of what occurred last week.

On Thursday I was visiting the Philadelphia "Manual School" and the "Oral Branch" with Dr. Bell. In the afternoon Dr. Gallaudet came from Washington. He asked Mr. Crouter to endeavor to bring about an amicable adjustment between himself and Dr. Bell. In presenting his case he quite drew upon Mr. Crouter's sympathies, though he did not bring him to condemn Dr. Bell's motives or conduct in opposing the Normal Class scheme before Congress. Mr. Crouter had recently looked over the correspondence between Dr. Bell and Mr. Fechhemier of Cincinnati, and between Dr. Bell and the Congressional committees, and told Dr. Gallaudet that it was his judgment that instead of Dr. Bell's making explanation and "expressing regret for words written and spoken in heat," there was occasion for Dr. Gallaudet to make amends to Dr. Bell.

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Dr. Bell did not move in this matter of his own judgment unsupported by others. Before taking the first step he asked for advice and support which was heartily given by persons engaged in the work. Dr. Gillett when he was in Washington about the middle of February, before the Senate Committee on appropriations, agreed with Dr. Gallaudet as to the desirability of the establishment of a Normal Department in connection with the college, but told Dr. Gallaudet that he objected to the wording of his letter to the Secretary of the Interior, which as it was incorporated in the appropriation bill, formed the statute directing the purpose and manner of the expenditure of the appropriation. Dr. Gillett told him that verbal explanations made to Dr. Bell or to the Committees of Congress amounted to nothing so long as the wording of the bill remained unchanged, but Dr. Gallaudet was unwilling to make any change in the character of the appropriation by changing the wording of his letter incorporated in the bill, to make it accord more fully with his explanation of his purposes.

Dr. Gallaudet told Dr. Gillett that the reason he did not state to Congress what he wanted, distinctly, was that he would not have succeeded if he had endeavored to get an appropriation from Congress for the purpose of teaching the deaf to speak, but he could get an appropriation establishing a normal class to teach signs. That it was not necessary for him to pursue this course is shown by the fact that he did secure the \$3000 for speech. Dr. Gillett told him that if he had stated his "Combined" purpose as distinctly in the appropriation bill as he explained it in conversation, he would have met with little or no opposition.

Dr. Bell in all that he said and did before Congress and in correspondence with principals of schools and other persons, was open and above-board. He sent copies to Dr. Gallaudet of some of the letters he had written to congressmen and others, that Dr. Gallaudet might know exactly what he had said and done. When he wrote to Mr. Fechheimer to ask if Dr. Gallaudet was fairly presenting his wishes before Congress, he sent him the report containing Dr. Gallaudet's letter to the Secretary of the Interior, and in this as in every

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case where Dr. Bell presented what appeared to him to be Dr. Gallaudet's purposes and plans, he sent a report containing the printed matter that Dr. Gallaudet had revised and published. Concerning the circulars which Dr. Bell published presenting the committee discussion between himself and Dr. Gallaudet before the House Committee, I am told by Mr. Crouter that Dr. Gallaudet says Dr. Bell misrepresents the discussion as Dr. Gallaudet's matter is not corrected and Dr. Bell's is, but Dr. Bell gave Prof. Fay some days before we met in Philadelphia his reasons for believing that Dr. Gallaudet had corrected the stenographer's notes, and that too before he saw them. He said this because Prof. E. A. Fay had made a similar statement in conversation with Dr. Bell; (ie., he stated to Dr. Bell that he had misrepresented Dr. Gallaudet in the discussion.

Dr. Bell says that he sent to the House Committee reporter to see that the printed report of certain things he said in answer to Dr. Gallaudet were correctly presented, and found that both all that he had said and all that Dr. Gallaudet had said on that subject had been erased, and stood there with its erasures, a proof of revision. Dr. Bell was sorry, for what had been erased was a statement made by Dr. Gallaudet that the resolution of the California Convention was an indorsement of the Combined Method, and Dr. Bell's answer which had been erased, was that “ combined ” was in the original draft of the resolution, but was erased at the request of one or more members of the committee, who refused to accept the resolution unless the word “combined” was ommitted. Before sending to see why the statement and answers were not in his copy, he telegraphed to two different persons, members of the Committee of the California Convention in which the resolution had been presented for discussion— before it was presented to the convention,— for confirmation of the fact he had stated, and received the confirmation from them.

On Tuesday morning, the 3rd of March, the day on which final action before Congress had to be taken, and when it was thought the whole thing was lost, Dr. Gallaudet addressed the students in the college in a manner that is described in the Minnesota “Companion” of March 7th. Private letters were sent from the students to Rochester, and from other students to Philadelphia corroborating what is said in the Minnesota “Companion” and

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stating the disapproval of those students of the anger which Dr. Gallaudet manifested against Dr. Bell for his audacity in appearing before Congress in opposition to anything that he proposed, and of the unmeasured language in which he denounced Dr. Bell. The majority of the students, however, were deeply affected by Dr. Gallaudet's impassioned appeals, so that they could hardly find words to express their hatred of Dr. Bell. Those of them who were correspondents have written to many of the Institution papers throughout the country denouncing Dr. Bell,— as you may have seen if you have read the Institution papers,— impugning even his character and motives. The institution papers which are full of the spirit which has gone out from the college, represent that Dr. Bell is not only selfish in the motives which have led him to “his unwarrantable opposition to Dr. Gallaudet's plans,” but he is said to be wholly unacquainted with the interests of deaf-mute education and unqualified to form a judgment as to the value of methods, or to express an opinion as to what is advantageous to the moral and social interests of the deaf; that he knows nothing about the sign language or the results of the work in the sign schools;— and a great deal more of like character; so that they wind up with “who is this man Bell?”

While such matter as this has been presented to the public and some of it to members of Congress, there are facts which everybody in Washington is acquainted with which have made these personal detractions react against Dr. Gallaudet and have won support for the arguments of Dr. Bell. Some of these facts are;— Dr. Bell has been a teacher of the deaf; he has conducted a normal class of teachers of the deaf for several years; he has a deaf-mute wife; he is so much interested in the education of the deaf that he has visited a large number of schools for the deaf in Europe and America, and has attended several conventions in America and abroad; he has spent years in collecting statistics concerning adult deaf-mutes which has made him acquainted with a wide range of facts incident to and resulting from the methods of their education, and has written and read a great deal of matter in relation to the deaf. Such facts as these together with a personal acquaintance with Dr. Bell have been sufficient to influence legislators to the degree that they were willing to support a measure that Dr. Bell approved and to defeat one that he disapproved,

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even though his position was opposed by Dr. Gallaudet himself. An estrangement and coldness toward Dr. Bell on the part of Dr. Gallaudet would probably not affect the latter materially, but the absence of cordial relations between Dr. Bell and the officials of the college, should it become generally felt in Washington society, would undoubtedly have a harmful social affect upon Mr. Gallaudet would undoubtedly have a harmful social effect upon Dr. Gallaudet and his family. This might be a small matter for outsiders like ourselves to concern themselves about were it not that appropriations and legislation for the college in Washington depend largely upon social influence. A social adjustment might have been affected while Dr. Bell and Dr. Gallaudet were together in Philadelphia on Thursday morning had Mr. Crouter known of Dr. Bell's willingness at that time to meet Dr. Gallaudet.

With regard to the statement that Dr. Bell knows nothing about signs;— while it is undoubtedly true that he never did know the sign language thoroughly, and has forgotten much of what he once knew, he understands more about signs than he is given credit for. He took daily lessons in signs of Chamberlain, who is now at Rome, and of someone else, —a Hartford graduate,— for more than a year while he was in Boston. It was through his instrumentality that the finance committee of hearing men was formed in Boston to hold funds for the deaf-mute societies there, and he arranged all this with the societies through signs.

Dr. Bell is charged with opposing Dr. Gallaudet's normal scheme because of his selfish ambition to promote pure oral teaching. Those who make this charge against Dr. Bell are in error:— In the first place because Dr. Bell is not a pure oralist, and in the second place, he would have opposed the establishment of a Government training-school to give Government support to a pure oral normal training-school. When in England before the Royal Commission, he opposed and defeated a project that was then urged upon the Commission to place the pure oral teachers' training-school at Ealing under the patronage of the Government. He opposed it on the ground that Government support of an especial method was harmful to the best interests of education, as it prevented competition and thus arrested progress. He favored the Berkley, Mass. school which would otherwise

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not hard has State support; he also favored the Florida school. He has never opposed the work of teachers because they differ with him as to methods of education. It is Dr. Bell's opinion, if I understand him, that in estimating the value of the sign language, sign teachers are apt to overlook the fact that those of their pupils who become distinguished as sign makers and scholars are those only who have been developed through English, — having partial hearing, or recollection of the language acquired before hearing was lost, or a habit of reading or of finger spelling;— those who have received comparatively little through these means, and have been practically limited to the sign language for what they know have not been distinguished as fine sign makers or as educated men. He would criticise the oralists also for claiming more for oral intercourse than belongs to it, in the development of pupils in oral schools, as those who have the most satisfactory development and power of oral intercourse owe it to familiarity with language in its alphabetic rather than its oral form, having received more through reading and writing than through speech.

Dr. Gallaudet states in his recent circular, as he has frequently done to Dr. Bell and others, — since Dr. Bell questioned the advisability of the Government's being responsible for the particular methods that he seemed to advocate in his letter to the Secretary of the Interior, — that it has always been his purpose “in the proposed normal class, to teach articulation and the “Combined Method to hearing persons, (as well as to selected “graduates of the college), and thus fit them to fill any position “in the profession. But you will notice that Dr. Bell is not the only one who has misapprehended Dr. Gallaudet's purpose in establishing the normal class:— in the articles which the college students and principal of schools have written against Dr. Bell, their accusation against him is that he has opposed Dr. Gallaudet's plan to establish a normal school for the deaf-mute graduates of the college; and has opposed the method of instruction followed at the college, for that they have supposed, that, as the appropriation bill directed that the money be used to increase the existing normal advantages of the college, the method of the department created by enlarging the

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normal facilities would be conducted on the educational lines heretofore characteristic of the college.

Dr. Gallaudet's last circular, it seems to me, would have been much more in harmony with the dignity of the college if it had been a college document, and not a circular designed to justify Dr. Gallaudet individually. If he had made the announcements he had to make without referring to "certain persons" or to the fact that "his plans were not changed by recent interferences;" he would not then have shown his vexation, or have suggested a question as to whether or not any person had formed definite plans which were binding upon the college directors before the meeting of the Board on the day on which the circular was printed.

Dr. Gallaudet told Mr. Crouter that he was going to Hartford to lay the matter before Mr. Williams, who, of course has had no opportunity to understand both sides of the matter as Mr. Crouter did. Dr. Gallaudet's presentation of his cause with effect anyone to intense sympathy for him. The good doctor is a most extraordinary pleader. He knows how to present his cause in every telling aspect. Mr. McCurdy, Dr. Bell's secretary, told Mr. Crouter and me that, on the 26th of January, just before they went before the House Committee, Dr. Gallaudet made an appeal to Dr. Bell very much like what he presented to Mr. Crouter last week, and presented it with most consummate skill. Failing to overcome Dr. Bell's quiet purpose to oppose Government support to his training-class, Dr. Gallaudet parted from him with these words, "We meet at Phillips."

I have written you this long letter with a most pacific purpose. Not to influence you against Dr. Gallaudet, nor to win you to support Dr. Bell, but to tell you somewhat of the other side of the story. I do not think it necessary to attempt to set Dr. Bell right before the deaf or before many teachers of the deaf. Anything printed in his behalf would only increase the heat of those who are excited against him. Enough has been in print. I hope Dr. Bell may not find it necessary for his vindication to publish the whole discussion and

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correspondence, as it might do Dr. Gallaudet harm and widen the breach between Dr. Gallaudet and Dr. Bell without doing commensurate good.

If you think it necessary to say anything about this letter to Mr. Jenkins, I hope you will advise him not to stir up discussion. I imagine that if he hears Dr. Gallaudet's story he will see a brilliant duel in prospect and would be glad of a chance to take part in it. In Dr. Gallaudet the profession has a great deal at stake. We can hardly afford to let him make mistakes in public. Should the eyes of the Washington public, and the hearing world at large, be directed to this matter their verdict might be that the good doctor had lost his head—and had said and done things not worthy of the man who is at the head of the whole profession.. It might put Dr. Bell right before some of the educators of the deaf, perhaps, but with many of them he could not be put right; to them there can be no good thing in him because he refuses to accept and champion signs. I can understand their feeling, but the world at large cares little, and the political world cares still less, for either manual or oral methods, but for the man who represents them.

Do you not think that Dr. Gallaudet should state in some public way that he regrets the publication of words accredited to him in the Minnesota "Companion" where he is reported to have publicly accused Dr. Bell before the students of the college of writing "letters to all the schools and institutions in the country, that were so worded as to misguide those not informed, and also contained several untruths, that were untruths to his knowledge," in some public way? Mr. Crouter advised him to do something to atone for the mischief his talks to the college students in chapel had caused.

Seeing that I have written you so long a letter with regard to the college affairs as represented by Dr. Gallaudet, I will add another item which has no relation to Dr. Bell, but a matter that you are interested in, and that I want you to know about, and if what I present here is not correctly stated I should be glad to have you set me right.

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You remember that at the New York Convention there was some discussion in regard to changes in the manner of holding and managing future conventions of instructors of the deaf, and that you and Mr. Ely on the last day of the convention opposed a proposition that I was favoring. Dr. Gallaudet stated that all that I proposed to do had been presented in a resolution that morning and had been referred to the Executive Committee of the Convention, and before the close of the Convention the Executive Committee expected to present a report in accordance with the resolution of the morning session. Under these circumstances I of course had nothing further to say: Mr. Crouter has since told me that he listened attentively to the entire proceedings of the convention and could not recollect any such resolution or any motion to refer the matter which Dr. Gallaudet publicly said the Convention had taken action upon; and that at the close of the Convention that night he went to the city, and sitting in the same seat with the stenographer who took notes of the proceedings, he asked him about it, and went over his notes. The stenographer was positive that no such resolution or motion to refer as was spoken of by Dr. Gallaudet had been before the Convention.

After my return home Mr. Ely wrote me from Frederick, stating that he had been misled by Dr. Gallaudet's statement, but as Mr. Currier verified Dr. Gallaudet's statement he believed it at the time. Later Mr. Ely found that Mr. Currier had misinformed him, and that no such action had taken place.

When on the 16th of February, the Directors of the especial convention met at the Madison Avenue Hotel in New York, Dr. Gillett and Mr. Crouter visited the institution at Washington Heights to pay their respects to Dr. Peet. While there Mr. Currier asked if they would like to look over the minutes of the convention. They expressed their willingness to look over his work and Mr. Currier for their inspection accidentally opened the book at the page on which was written the resolution purporting to have been presented at the convention and referred to the Executive Committee. Mr. Crouter was not convinced that the resolution was presented, though it is now in the minutes, and he questions the advisability of

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allowing the matter to go into print in this form, simply to justify Dr. Gallaudet. His first thought was that the matter ought to be thoroughly investigated.

I think it desirable that those who are interested should know these facts, but it hardly seems to me that any real good would be accomplished by publishing them at this time.

Sincerely yours, (Signed) Z. F. Westervelt

NATIONAL DEAF-MUTE COLLEGE, KENDALL GREEN, NEAR WASHINGTON, D. C.
March 10th, 1891. Z. F. Westervelt, Supt., Rochester, N. Y. My Dear Sir:—

Your valued favor received with enclosure as stated, and am greatly obliged.

I would kindly ask your opinion of the circular I sent you a few days since.

Respectfully yours, E. M. Gallaudet, Prest., F—

WESTERN NEW YORK INSTITUTION FOR DEAF-MUTE, 945 North Saint Paul Street.
Rochester, N. Y., March 2 ? 4 th, 1891. Dear Dr. Gallaudet:—

This is my first opportunity to answer your letter which came while I was away, week before last.

I am glad to hear that it is your purpose to engage Mr. Elmandorf to fill the new chair on the college faculty; his appointment as Professor of Articulation will I am sure give general satisfaction.

In response to your wish that I should tell you what I think of your circular, I would say that inasmuch as you deem it incumbent on you and the college to maintain The Combined Method, it is undoubtedly politic to establish scholarships for the training of teachers to promote the interests of that method. Your advocacy of The Combined Method is natural, as it is your child,— conceived and named by you; and as you have seen the great

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advantage to deaf-mute education resulting from its general adoption by what were, and what otherwise would still be, sign schools. Everyone interested in the teaching of the deaf must acknowledge that in adopting The Combined Method the sign schools of America took a long step in the right direction: and we who oppose it recognize the propriety of its adoption— in the main— by the National College, as the college is a representative institution. I had not understood that you considered yourself or the college committed to the advocacy of The Combined Method, as you have pronounced yourself strongly in favor of other progressive ideas in education;— it was largely through utterances of yours that I was led to experiment in the line of work which has developed and established the principles which characterize this school.

My observation and experience compel me to hold views in relation to The Combined method which are antagonistic to these you advocate in your plan for a normal class:— I could not appoint as a teacher in this school one who had been trained to regard The Combined Method as essential in the instruction of the deaf.

The maintenance of such a normal training-class from private funds cannot be objected to, but there is a strong ground for opposing a plan to secure the favor and support of the National Government to a normal training-school established to advocate any particular method of instruction. It would be impracticable for any normal school to undertake to train teachers for work in schools of opposing principles. The opposition to the scheme, which was manifested as soon as it was published was directed against the principle of Governmental favoritism, and was not a personal attack against the one who represented it.

I should like to say a few words in regard to the matter between yourself and Dr. Bell suggested in your circular. I can state with great positiveness that in the position he took before Congress, Dr. Bell was sustained by teachers who are actively engaged in the work of deaf-mute education and that in what he said and did he was their acknowledged representative. So far as we are acquainted with the matter and manner of what was said

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and done— and we were kept fully informed— Dr. Bell's action was in every way open and above-board; and what he said a plain and just statement of his understanding of your and his position. I know that this was not your understanding and belief at the time I saw you, but I trust you will come to see that in this controversy Dr. Bell has said nothing and done nothing that could justly be considered discourteous or unfair. When I was at the college you presented as an instance of what you regarded the duplicity and personal injustice of Dr. Bell toward you, the fact that he had not in any of his statements regarding the normal training-class, given publicity to plans which you had detailed to him in conversation at his house. In my opinion he would have erred had he taken the liberty of publishing what you had thought best to with-hold from publication. The plans that were finally decided upon and adopted by the Directors of the College at their meeting on the 7th of March, as announced in your circular of that date, were not plans that Dr. Bell would have opposed. Dr. Bell quoted in full the matter that you had revised and published in your report and in your letter to the Secretary of the Interior as the official presentation of the plan for the Normal Department of the college, whenever he discussed the matter. Whatever purposes you had that were not included in the letter to Secretary Noble could have no bearing upon the proposition which Dr. Bell was combating; for that letter was incorporated in the bill and would have become the statutory direction and limitation as to the disposition of the money appropriated.

In nearly every article that I have seen in the deaf-mute papers the writer interprets your letter to Secretary Noble just as Dr. Bell interpreted it, the only difference being that the deaf approve of it so interpreted, and Dr. Bell disapproved.

The whole profession would have cause to regret should the difference of views between yourself and Dr. Bell as to methods of education or regarding the propriety of Governmental indorsement and support he made a personal issue. The educational principles on which opposing methods have grown up are striving by results to

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demonstrate each its right to existence, and time, under the law of the survival of the fittest, must decide between them.

Dr. Bell is laboring to promote what he believes to be the best interests of deaf-mute education, and his sympathy and cooperation are very acceptable to a considerable portion of the active teachers of the deaf. This fact is well known, as is also the work Dr. Bell has done and the interest he has manifested in questions relative to the deaf, aside from those relating to their education, and there is every reason why we should endeavor to hold not only his but every man's active interest in our work.

Very sincerely yours, Z. F. Westervelt Dr. ? M. Gallaudet, Prest., National Deaf Mute College, Kendall Green, near Washington, D. C. P. S. So far as I have heard from them, your strongest friends in the profession think it was better that the amendment presented through Senator Dawes become the law rather than the bill that was defeated. Z. F. W.